

## Signs of Dyslexia

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### Warning Signs of Dyslexia

“If life gives you melons, you may have dyslexia.” Most of us smile and shake our heads at this type of witticism. Our knowledge of dyslexia may begin and end with reading backwards jokes. Yet if one child in five has some degree of dyslexia, you probably have four dyslexic children in your classroom of twenty students! That makes it your job to learn more about exactly what dyslexia is and how to identify which of your students show warning signs for dyslexia.

### Dyslexia Defined

Dyslexia simply defined is, “Extreme difficulty learning to read and spell in ones’ native language despite at least average intelligence and adequate instruction.” Dyslexia cannot be “cured” any more than large feet can be made smaller or musical tone deafness can be turned to musical genius. Dyslexia can, however, be remediated using special teaching methods developed specifically for dyslexic learners.

The earlier remediation begins, the better the outcome for the child. For that reason, it is important to identify the children showing warning signs for dyslexia and assist parents in getting those children tested. Diagnosis is not an end in itself, but rather a starting point for getting the student started with remediation.

Many of the signs of dyslexia blur the lines between home and school. Partnering with parents in considering warning signs in their child will lead to a more informed conclusion. Parents will know about family history of dyslexia, a warning sign for dyslexia in all ages. (IDA, 2008). Parents know their child as no one else does, and they are a crucial part of the process of both identification and remediation. Students are in a teacher’s care for a year or two, but in the parents’ care for a lifetime.

## Warning signs in a preschooler

Most preschool aged clues come from oral language.

Sound manipulation difficulties (Hall, 2011)

Word games - inability to pull a word apart into the individual sounds.

Rhyming- unable to match rhyming words or supply a word to rhyme with a given word

Identifying words that start with same sound

Difficulty learning to talk or delayed talking

Difficulty learning to pronounce words correctly

Difficulty remembering words, names or directions

## Warning signs in a Kindergartener

Preschool signs plus:

Difficulty linking a letter with the sound it makes.

Difficulty learning the alphabet

Difficulty with reading skills such as

Remembering a new word

Ability to pull a spoken word apart into each of its individual sounds

Ability to push letter sounds together and blend them into a word.

Inability to spell simple words (getting at least most consonants correct) or to spell his or her own name correctly.

Inability to sound out the simplest of three letter words, such as hat or mop.

## Warning signs in a First Grader

Some kindergarten signs plus:

Resistant to reading orally, even if it is one-on-one

Will omit words in a sentence without realizing it or fixing his error

Needs to sound out the same word each time it appears on the page

Will guess at a word based on how it looks or the letter it begins with

Warning signs in elementary students

Some kindergarten and first grade signs plus:

ROAST is an acronym for the most common reading errors made by dyslexic students.

Reversals - reading "was" for "saw"

Omissions - leaving out words or letters

Additions - inserting words or letters not in the text

Substitutions - saying a different word from what is in the text, but one that is a synonym for the misread word.

Transpositions - reading words out of the order in which they are written.

Additional warning signs include:

Slow at remembering isolated facts, such as dates, phone numbers, lists

No strategy for decoding unknown words - likely to guess based on first and last sounds

Inability to consistently read small words such as the, in, then

Slow, labored, unexpressive oral reading

Avoidance of situations in which oral reading will be required

Very poor spelling, often the word is unrecognizable

Messy handwriting in a child with otherwise nimble fingers

Very poor at multiple choice tests

General characteristics of dyslexic individuals of all ages

Club grip on pencil when writing or coloring. Thumb over index finger

Disorganization and frequent losing things

Poor study habits, difficulty finishing assignments

Struggle to retrieve desired word when speaking - often saying "thingy" or "stuff"

Difficulty with directionality (Garside and Wilkins, 2002).

Warning signs are there, what is next?

Warning signs are just that, warnings to be on the lookout for a problem. They are not proof a problem exists. What is noteworthy is a pattern of warning sign behavior over a period of time. This is especially important if there is a family history of dyslexia.

Once a pattern of warning signs is established, it is important not to fall into the wait-and-see trap. The earlier a child receives specific instruction to remediate his or her dyslexia, the more successful the outcome.

Testing is available to provide a firm diagnosis of dyslexia and to show which areas of the language process are areas of difficulty and which are areas of strength. Google "Dyslexia Testing" to find a tester in your area, or contact the International Dyslexia Association ([www.interdys.org](http://www.interdys.org)). The best tests are 2 - 3 hours long, and include a family history, observations of the subject reading and speaking, and tests of reading and language. A diagnosis of dyslexia comes from a finding of reading difficulties in a person who otherwise has at least average intelligence, is motivated to work hard, and has adequate teaching.

Tutoring instruction using a specific method developed for dyslexic students (not general reading tutoring) should be implemented as soon as a diagnosis of dyslexia is confirmed. (Gillingham and Stillman, 2002). The International Dyslexia Association has state associations which can assist you in locating qualified tutors trained in this highly effective method for remediating dyslexia.

The outcome for a dyslexic student is bright once the student is identified as dyslexic, (Shaywitz, 2003) connected with a qualified tutor, and begins to use the skills his or her tutor will teach. By taking the first steps to identify the struggling readers or illogical spellers in your classroom as dyslexic, you play a key role in changing a child's life from one of struggle to one of overcoming.

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